

They were really a joy to watch, and I congratulate them on their tremendous achievement.

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H. Res. 187.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BURGESS). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Connecticut?

There was no objection.

#### SMALLPOX EMERGENCY PERSONNEL PROTECTION ACT OF 2003

Mr. BURR. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Energy and Commerce, the Committee on Education and the Workforce, and the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration of the bill (H.R. 1770) to provide benefits and other compensation for certain individuals with injuries resulting from administration of smallpox countermeasures, and for other purposes, and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from North Carolina?

Mrs. CAPPS. Mr. Speaker, reserving the right to object, the emergency supplemental appropriations bill which the Congress should pass shortly was going to include a smallpox vaccination compensation program. Now it is being presented for unanimous consent.

For many months I have worked closely with the community of first responders. Many of them are nurses. I commend the leadership of the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. DINGELL) and the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), who have worked with many other Members of this body to make this program, this compensation program as good as possible. And when we beat a bad bill, which was on the suspension calendar a few days ago as we did, then it gives us an opportunity to improve the program as it was presented. That is what has been attempted to do. Great efforts have been expended and have resulted in marked improvements on the woefully inadequate proposal that the administration initially put forward.

I salute again my colleagues who have worked hard from within this body to represent the needs of our first responders as they anticipate and step

forward to become a part of the shield against bioterrorist attack.

The administration, however, was difficult in this area. I am not convinced that this end product which is before us today really will inspire enough confidence in nurses to make the vaccine program work. However, again, I reiterate that there are improvements in the initial bill that were put forward.

But the process back and forth from the White House to the House of Representatives was very much in the arena of parsimonious, as the progress that was made came in bits and pieces. It felt to the community of first responders as if they were being nicked and dined. And now, with the product that we have, the nursing community, many of the people who will be the first responders, many of them tell me that the safety net provided in the bill before us today still has large holes in it. And it is told to us that the administration has refused to go any further than what is in this bill.

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Now, time will tell us if this proposal succeeds, and the proof is actually not right here in this body but out in the community, in our homeland security efforts, in our communities where firefighters, police officers, EMTs, nurses will be asked to roll up their sleeves to become heroes on behalf of us all.

If they feel confidence that the government will stand behind them with a good compensation package, they will be more inspired to do this. I wish I could be more confident. However, again I remark that there has been progress made.

For example, I myself was recently asked by the Capitol physician to be a first responder here in the Congress. For that reason, I have been asked to get a smallpox vaccination myself; and I am presently consulting with my doctor, as I should do, and with other medical experts about the advisability of this.

But if I do take this vaccine and something goes wrong, I know that my family and my dependents will be taken care of because I am covered by the Federal Employees Compensation Act.

Under the bill that we will pass today under unanimous consent, a nurse in Santa Barbara, a firefighter in any community across this country who takes a vaccine to serve his or her country, may not have that same confidence. So this goes beyond the consideration of a particular vaccine; it really gets down to how we value our first responders and what we are asking them to do on behalf of their country.

Many have said that on 9/11 we crossed through a threshold in this country, and life has been different ever since. We now face the prospect lurking every single day, the possibility of a terrorist attack.

One of the real threats that we face as a nation to which we desire to pro-

tect ourselves is the threat of a bioterrorist attack. We saw that as the anthrax situation came upon us.

Who are the first responders who are called upon to answer the call in the event of such an attack? These are those who work and live among us, ordinary citizens asked now by their government, by their President, to take on extraordinary responsibility.

For many, life goes on as normal. They take the vaccine and nothing will happen. But for a few, and a very few, a drastic reaction could happen. There is a risk to this act of patriotism that we are asking our fellow citizens to take on.

I want us to be, with every measure within us, standing behind them; so that for that handful of people who have life permanently altered for themselves and are never able to be the breadwinner for their family, as they have been in the past, because they stepped forward on behalf of their country, I want them to have the full measure of protection such as I have as a Federal employee.

Reluctantly, I look at the package before us: parsimonious, in my regard. I will withdraw my reservation, but I will do so reluctantly, because I want this process to be better.

Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw my reservation of objection with the hope that our administration, our leaders, will continue to work to give the assurance that screening, that education be available for every first responder to avoid the risks, as many of them as we can.

We can work to make this package even better.

Mr. BURR. Mr. Speaker, will the gentlewoman yield?

Mrs. CAPPS. I yield to the gentleman from North Carolina.

Mr. BURR. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding to me.

This process has been enhanced by the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. CAPPS) and her expertise and her passion on this particular issue.

There is no doubt that this initiative is one that is needed for first responders, regardless of the community that they come from, because without identifying specifically where the threat may be, we have to make sure that we prepare 100 percent of our first responders and health care workers.

Mr. Speaker, the unanimous consent request before us today for the Smallpox Emergency Personnel Protection Act of 2003, a bill critical to our public health security and to our national security against the potential devastating threat of a terrorist release of the deadly smallpox virus, this bill is based on H.R. 1463, which I introduced in the Committee on Energy and Commerce, but it contains refinements, refinements that have been agreed to on a bipartisan basis with the ranking member, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. DINGELL), the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. CAPPS), the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), and the